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CHECK IT OUT HERE

A kitchen scene featuring a wooden cutting board with a knife, a bowl, and a glass of red wine. The text "365 COOKING TIPS & TRICKS" is overlaid in green, with "COOKING" underlined. Below it, "EVERY COOK NEEDS TO KNOW" is written in white with a horizontal line underneath.

365 COOKING TIPS & TRICKS

EVERY COOK NEEDS TO KNOW

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Tips are categorized into subject areas so that you can choose the ones you'd like for specific projects.

General Cooking

1. Milk should never be boiled when you heat it for recipes. It needs to be “scalded” (heated over medium heat just until the milk around the edges of the pan start to bubble slightly). Boiled milk will leave you with a big, ugly gout of “skin” and will not taste half as good in recipes.
2. Don't add scalded milk all at once to your recipe. Cool it to just above lukewarm, and add a little at a time to avoid curdling your recipe.
3. If you are adding scalded milk to the liquid portion of a recipe that contains egg, add a tablespoon or two of your slightly cooled, scalded milk to the egg first, to prevent curdling.
4. Make sure your kitchen contains basic staples: Herbs, salt, sugar, flour, your favorite grain such as rice or couscous, apples, onions, carrots, potato, consommé or bouillon cubes, your favorite noodles, tomato sauce, beans, cans or packets of soup, butter or margarine, and a good quality cooking oil, such as virgin olive oil. With these basic ingredients, you can whip up a variety of accompaniments and sauces to go with meat or fish.
5. Make sure your kitchen contains these basic herbs and seasonings: Basil, thyme or marjoram, tarragon, black pepper, sea salt, oregano, dill, parsley, cinnamon, nutmeg and paprika. (These are the herbs most commonly used in recipes. Add curry powder, cumin and coriander if you love Eastern foods.)
6. Did you know that the herb saffron consists of the stamens of a certain type of crocus, harvested individually by hand? (That's why the price is so high.) Saffron gives a delicate flavor and a deep golden-yellow color to rice or potatoes.)
7. Store your herbs away from light or heat to prevent compromising the herb quality.
8. If a recipe calls for “de-glazing”, it means to take the juices and fats remaining at the bottom of a pan after you've removed the food you are cooking, and adding liquid. The idea is to scrape all remaining bits of food into this liquid and use it in another sauce, such as a gravy.
9. When a recipe calls for you to “simmer” a dish, the temperature shouldn't exceed 180°F. Simmering is done at the lowest heat possible that still allows a stew or sauce to bubble lightly around the edges.
10. To dissolve the thin glaze of juices and brown bits on the surface of a pan in which food has been fried, sautéed or roasted, add liquid and stir and scrape over high heat, thereby adding flavor to the liquid for use as a sauce.
11. When a recipe calls for “zest”, this means the freshly-grated rind of a citrus fruit. You can use a fine grater to quickly extract it, after washing and thoroughly drying the fruit.

Holiday Cooking

12. When you plan your menu, plan what you're going to need to store in your fridge – and make sure there is adequate space and shelving. Then clear your fridge of all stale or leftover food the day before shopping for the holidays.
13. When preparing your holiday food shopping list, be sure to check that you have adequate supplies of hard goods such as parchment paper, wax paper, plastic wrap, foil, baking cups, paper towel and containers for leftovers.
14. Your kitchen can look (and feel) like a battleground when you are in the throes of preparing holiday feasts. It really helps if you first clear all your countertops of anything that won't be needed for holiday food preparation and give them a good clean. Then put out bowls, utensils, accessories, spices and small appliances that you will need.
15. When thawing turkey for the holidays, be aware of the bacteria zone – 40°F—140°F – where bacteria will multiply quickly. The outer layer of your bird will reach this temperature at around the 2-hour mark –even if the interior needs a day or more to thaw.
16. To avoid bacteria growth, always thaw your turkey in the refrigerator or in a tightly-sealed plastic bag placed in cold water.
17. You can thaw a turkey in your microwave – but if you can't follow the manufacturer's directions (e.g. your turkey exceeds the maximum recommended size), it's not safe to do so.
18. Allow 24 hours per 5lbs, when thawing turkey in the refrigerator – providing your refrigerator is set just below 40°F.
19. When thawing a turkey in cold water, follow the 30-minute rule: Change the water with fresh, cold water every 30 minutes and allow 30 minutes per pound.
20. If you soak your turkey in any sort of brine solution in the refrigerator, be aware that it may give the meat a pinkish look (but it's not undercooked!)
21. When thawing a turkey in the refrigerator, don't rely on its plastic bag: Put it in a bowl or on a baking tray to ensure nothing drips onto foods below.
22. Be on your guard against cross-contamination, when preparing holiday poultry. Never chop vegetables on any surface that has contained your turkey: Thoroughly wash and clean all cutting boards and utensils before preparing other foods.
23. Use a meat thermometer to ensure your turkey is properly – and safely – cooked at 165°F interior temperature. (Don't cook in an oven whose temperature is any lower than 325°F.)

24. Follow safe practices with your stuffing, too. Insert your stuffing mixture right before cooking, salting the body cavity interior first. And check your stuffing also with your thermometer: It, too, should reach 165 degrees.
25. Remember that stuffing your holiday poultry will increase cooking time. (Figure on a minimum of 3 hours for an 8lb bird; 3 ½ hours for a 12lb. bird; 4 ¼ hours for a 15lb, give or take 20 minutes – use your thermometer to ensure interior temperature has reach 165°F throughout.)
26. Never buy pre-stuffed birds – the stuffing is just too susceptible to bacteria.
27. Let turkeys and other large birds sit for 15 minutes before removing the stuffing.
28. Peel potatoes ahead of time! They won't discolor and turn brownish at the edges if you store them in a bowl or pan of cold water in your fridge. (They'll keep for up to one day.)
29. Instead of cooking hot green beans, consider making a festive bean salad with red, green and yellow beans – there are many wonderful recipes on the net. Make it the day before, cover and chill in your refrigerator to marinate. Introduce it as “Christmas Bean Salad” – and make it a tradition!
30. Prepare green beans easily by lining them up, side-by-side, on a cutting board, with the woody ends all at the same end. Take a large chef's knife and slice off all the ends in one go. Wash your beans and store in cold water until it's time to put them on.
31. For Brussels sprouts, chop off the ends and pull off the outer leaves (they will come off easily once the ends are chopped off). Make a cross with your knife in the cut end of each sprout (about ¼—½ inch deep, depending on the size of the individual sprout). Keep in mind that the smaller the sprout, the more tender and fresh it will taste – large ones tend to be “woody” or tough.
32. Buy squash cut and pre-packaged, to save work time and counter space. Wash cut pieces thoroughly before using. Dice down further to even pieces.
33. Be sure to thoroughly wash all salad greens in cold water before serving – even if the package says “pre-washed”. Pat dry with paper towel.
34. It's tempting to “just leave” all the dishes for “tomorrow” – but clean up after yourself in the kitchen as much as you can during the preparation process. Take the extra few seconds to put containers back in cupboards, jars left in the fridge, etc.
35. If you have trouble removing burned food or fat from the bottom of your roasting pan, scrape out as much as you can and let cool. Fill it with cold water, adding 4 tbsp. baking soda. Soak overnight. The next day, bring your pan of water and baking soda to the boil on the top of the stove and simmer at a low heat for half an hour. Your roast pan should magically come clean.
36. When carving your turkey, be sure to start with the proper, nicely sharp carving utensils. Check them right now – don't wait until the bird is ready to be served to discover they're dull!

37. Be sure to refrigerate all cooked, leftover food within 2 hours of serving. (Leaving food sitting out on the dining room table or buffet for too long is one of the major causes of holiday tummy troubles.)
38. When re-heating holiday leftovers in the microwave, be sure to let it sit, covered, for at least two minutes before serving. The microwave heats unevenly, so this will help ensure it finishes cooking without leaving areas at less than the safe 165°F temperature you need.)
39. To make sure Christmas cookies keep their shape, triple-chill your dough. After removing chilled dough from the refrigerator, roll it out on lightly flour-dusted parchment paper placed on cutting board. Put board with the cookies straight into your fridge and chill again (15 min.) Flour your cookie cutter, remove chilled cookies and cut out the shapes. Re-flour between each cut. Line your baking tray with parchment paper, place cookies – and chill for a final 15 minutes before baking.

Foreign Cooking Terms

40. A la creole: With tomatoes added.
41. Al dente: (Italian) Refers to pasta. Firm “to the tooth”; not soft. But there should be no hard center.
42. Al forno: (Italian) Literally “to the oven”. Cooked in an oven.
43. Allemande: (French) If you see a sauce designated as “Allemande”, it will most likely contain veal stock, cream and egg yolk (as well as lemon juice).
44. Au gratin: (French) Most people think this means “with cheese” – but in the culinary world, it is used to signify a topping of breadcrumbs, butter and grated, fresh cheeses.
45. Au jus: (French) Meat roasted and served in its own juices, with no other moisture added.
46. Au tour: (French) “All around”. Sauce is poured round a dish; not all over it.
47. Bain-marie: (French) A container of hot water into which you insert and cook food that you don’t want to curdle. (The principle is similar to double boiling.)
48. Béarnaise: A light hollandaise sauce variation, flavored with tarragon, and meant to be served with roasted meats.
49. Béchamel: (French) Basic white sauce made from a roux (butter and flour bubbled over a low heat till slightly browned) and milk. Many cream sauces start with a béchamel.
50. Bisque: A hearty soup, usually fish – but when the term is applied to desserts, it refers to a macaroon/ice cream mixture.

51. Blanch: (French) Immersing fresh vegetables very briefly in water that has been brought to a rolling boil. (Stop the cooking process by straining them and cooling them briefly under ice-cold, running water.) Keeps crispness for salads without the vegetable being bitter or indigestible; and retains/enhances color.
52. Bordelaise: A brown gravy containing shallots and red wine.
53. Bouillabaisse: (French) French fish stew or soup.
54. Bouquet Garni: (French) Fresh parsley, thyme, celery and a bay leaf wrapped in layers of leek and tied with string into a firm parcel. One end of the string is often kept long, as your bouquet garni is inserted into pots of stock (water plus meat bones), and removed at the end of cooking.
55. Bouillon: Similar to stock, but meat is simmered in water, rather than bones and seasoning is traditionally more robust. Makes a clear broth that can be used as the base for soups – or drunk on its own.
56. Canapé: Finger-food appetizer served with drinks, before people sit down at the table and while they mingle.
57. Caramelization: heating substances with carbohydrates slowly up to 300°F on the stove top, which causes substances such as sugar or onions to turn brown, syrupy and slightly thickened.
58. Chiffonade: (French) A way of feathering leafy vegetables for decoration.
59. Chinois: (French) Inverted-cone-shaped, fine metal strainer for stocks, sauces and soups. Usually hangs on chains. (With sauces, it is meant for ensuring lumps are strained out and often a pestle is used to work these through the mesh.)
60. Choux: (French) A rich pastry made of eggs, butter, flour and water or milk. Most often used for cream puffs, profiteroles and other light, airy desserts.
61. Concassé: (French) Coarsely-chopped vegetables in chunks.
62. Consommé: (French) Clear meat broth.
63. Coulis: (French) Finely puréed fruit, resulting in a thin, smooth syrup or sauce.
64. Crepe: French) Very thin pancake, usually rolled around a sweet or savory filling.
65. Croustade: (French) A loaf or bun that has been hollowed out and lightly toasted, so that the centre can be filled with a savory, hot filling such as a stew.
66. Crudités: (French) Another term for fresh or blanched vegetables served in sticks or chunks as a go-with or appetizer.

- 67. Florentine: (Italian) Usually signifies a dish cooked with spinach.
- 68. Fondant: (French) A mixture of sugar and water simmered and reduced to the “soft-ball” stage. Poured fondant is used to fill candies. Hard fondant usually has gelatin or marshmallow added, and can be rolled out to use as the middle layer of sandwich cookies; or used to cover and decorate a cake.
- 69. Frappé: (French) Semi-frozen. Still liquid but thick with ice particles.
- 70. Fricassee: (French) stew made with meat that has not first been browned.
- 71. Glacé: (French) Glazed or covered with icing. Refers to the shiny surface glazed dishes or food items have.
- 72. Gremolata: (Italian) Fresh parsley, garlic and lemon zest added at the end of cooking to stews.
- 73. Hors d'oeuvres: (French) Fancy appetizer served at the start of your meal.
- 74. Julienne: Raw vegetables such as carrots and celery that have been chopped into fine “matchsticks”.
- 75. Meunière: (French) Flouring fish or meat and sautéing it in butter.
- 76. Mirepoix: (French) Chopped onion, carrot and celery mixture.
- 77. Roux: (French) Butter and flour cooked over low heat together to form a thickening agent.
- 78. Velouté: Stock mixed into a roux. Can stand alone, or act as the base for other sauces and gravies.
- 79. Vinaigrette: (French) Dressing made from oil and vinegar, with added seasonings.
- 80. Vol au vent: (French) Cylinder of puff pastry no more than 2” high, filled with savory fillings. Before serving, remove the “lid” from the centre of your vol au vent, fill and replace “lid” if desired.
- 81. Zabaglione: (Italian) Also known as “Sabayon” (French). Custard made with egg yolks and sweet wine.
- 82. Zwieback: (German) Twice-toasted bread.

Breads and Quickbreads

- 83. Bread technically always contains a yeast agent. Quickbreads are simulated bread recipes that don't contain yeast (and are usually quicker as a result of not having to wait for rising time).
- 84. About to make bread but you've just discovered you don't have any yeast? Don't panic: You can make incredibly delicious quickbread by adding a cup of beer or sparkling wine. (If you use beer, add a few herbs to your recipe as well for a wonderful, savory treat.)

85. Bread will not rise as well if you use cold milk: The whey contains proteins that damage gluten, so scald your milk first.
86. When adding scalded milk to a bread recipe that contains yeast, make sure it is cooled to lukewarm. If it is too hot, it may kill the yeast. If it is too cool, it won't help the yeast rise.
87. Use a heavy, stoneware bowl when making bread dough. Cover dough with a clean linen tea towel while setting it to rise.
88. Try setting your bowl of dough on the top of your refrigerator while waiting for dough to rise. The warmth from the fridge can often create the perfect rising temperature. (Bread dough must rise in a slightly warm place)
89. Dough that is too stiff can prevent yeast from activating properly.
90. Baby your bread machine – contrary to popular belief, you can easily break them if you don't respect their parameters. Use recipes meant specifically for bread machines (especially the ones that come with your model of machine) – and avoid super-heavy doughs and artisan breads.
91. All-purpose flour is best for quickbreads.
92. If you want to avoid a milky taste to white bread and boost the flavor, replace half the water with yogurt, according to bread expert Dan Lepard.
93. Place a pan of water on the bottom rack of your oven, if you want your loaf top to rise and crack artistically for that farm-baked look.
94. Make sure the water or milk you add to your bread mixture is lukewarm to the back of your wrist. If it is too cold, it won't activate the yeast: If too hot, it will kill the yeast.
95. Add a spoonful of honey or sugar to your liquid while it is still hot, before cooling to lukewarm. Mix well to dissolve thoroughly.
96. When adding cereal-type grains such as oatmeal, first soak them in just enough boiling water to moisten them for at least 10 minutes.
97. Always lightly toast seeds or nuts before adding to bread. Doing so will help them be much more digestible (and appetizing).
98. Lightly coat your hands with olive oil before kneading bread dough.
99. Make sure there are no draughts where you set your dough to rise.
100. If you want your freshly-baked bread to slice without crumbling, first let it cool completely.

Gluten-Free

101. The most common cause of heaviness in gluten-free baking is too much potato, tapioca or cornstarch.
102. Buy only products that are certified as “Gluten-Free”.
103. Substitute sorghum flour for rice flour and make sure rice doesn’t constitute a major portion of your diet. Because rice is grown in flooded paddies, it may contain a higher than acceptable percentage of inorganic arsenic.
104. Don’t expect gluten-free flours to behave like wheat flour. You will have to re-learn how to bake through reading directions carefully, checking out anything you don’t understand (Google it online) and following said directions. And after all that, you’ll need to experiment to adapt recipes to your own unique conditions (your oven, heat type and consistency, climate, elevation above sea level, and so forth).
105. Pay attention to the weight of the flour you want to replace with a gluten-free substitute. Replacing a light flour with a heavy flour (and vice versa) would significantly affect your baking results.
106. Don’t forget to ensure your starches and thickeners are gluten-free too: Use potato, corn starch, arrowroot or tapioca starch for thickening or baking.
107. Oats are not always gluten-free. When purchasing oats or oatmeal, be aware of the possibility of cross-contamination with other grains and grain substances. Always choose the best quality – and check labels carefully.
108. Amaranth, buckwheat, pure cocoa powder, cornstarch, millet, oats, rice, quinoa, sorghum and teff are all gluten-free.
109. Spelt is absolutely not gluten-free: It is a grain related to wheat.
110. Barley and rye contain gluten.
111. Teff is an African grain with a nutty quality. It is rich in vitamin C and the highest of all the grains in calcium content.
112. Watch out for foods and cosmetics (yes, cosmetics) that unexpectedly contain gluten. (Look for ingredients like maltodextrin, dextrin and monodiglycerides.)
113. Common culprits containing “hidden” wheat: Soy sauce, corn flakes, instant coffee, canned soup and flavored snack chips of any sort. (Bottom line: Read the labels!)
114. If it doesn’t have a label, don’t eat it.
115. If you want your bread to taste more “whole grain”, add ground flax meal.
116. If you want your bread to have a more chewy texture, try adding Xanthan gum.

117. To prevent bread from collapsing in the middle, bake it in heavy bakeware with a lid. (The lid helps keep in moisture and lets the bread bake more evenly.)

118. If your bread dough is too stiff, add a spoonful of water. (Good gluten-free bread dough should resemble muffin mixture. It should not be leathery or smooth.)

119. If you want to thrill a gluten-free cook for Christmas, give her a heavy Pyrex loaf pan or deep casserole dish with a lid.

120. If you plan to do gluten-free baking, be sure to purchase a good instant-read thermometer to test the center of your loaves and cakes. (The temperature should read about 205°F minimum for done-ness.)

Desserts

121. When a recipe specifies separating your cake mixture into two pans, you can just bake a single layer in one pan – but be sure to increase your baking time for 7-10 minutes.

122. To see if your cake is perfectly baked, slip an ordinary dinner knife straight down into the cake center and pull up the same way. If any batter sticks to the knife, your cake is not yet done.

123. When frosting a cake, make sure you cool it completely and brush loose crumbs from its surface with a soft pastry brush. Always frost the sides before the top.

124. To keep your plate clean when frosting a cake, slide strips of wax or parchment paper under the edges. The strips will be easy to pull away from the cake when you have finished, and you won't disturb the cake.

125. Want an easy way to produce perfectly frosted cupcakes? Dip the cupcake top in your frosting, turn it and twist it out again. This will give you a professional-looking swirl on top, eliminates messy spatulas – and takes seconds.

126. When making a chocolate ganache, be sure to use equal parts chocolate and cream. If using it as an exterior glaze, add a spoonful of olive oil and stir completely, to give a nice sheen to your glaze.

127. Vary your liquid ratio slightly, when making chocolate ganache. The basic ratio to start with is equal parts chocolate and cream – but a truffle filling will take less liquid and a glaze slightly more.

128. When making a stiffer ganache for truffle fillings, use a chocolate with a cacao percentage as low as possible – they emulsify a lot more easily than chocolate with a high cacao percentage.

129. Always use a recipe that specifies the cacao percentage: To do otherwise is to run the risk of making a recipe created for a different cacao percentage than the chocolate you are using – and this can seriously affect your ganache.

130. When adding fruit or nuts to any cake recipe, sift the fruit or nuts lightly with a tablespoon or two of flour, using a fine-mesh strainer or sieve.

131. For a quick, impressive dessert, tear up any cake into chunks and line the bottom of a glass bowl or in individual parfait glasses. Spread loosely with strawberry jam. Garnish liberally with whipped cream. Congratulations! You have just made Emergency English Trifle. (Add a can of Devon Custard between the jam and the cream, if you have any in your pantry.)

132. Purchase meringue powder as a staple item in your kitchen, if you make a lot of frostings. Add a teaspoon if you are using more than ½ cup of sugar in any frosting or icing.

133. When making pumpkin pie, you can cook the filling in the top of a double boiler and add it to a perfectly-baked pie shell, if you prefer. (Chill pie before serving.)

134. When making muffins, stir only till liquid and dry ingredients are barely mixed. The batter should be lumpy – not smooth.

135. For crisp cookies, store in a loosely-covered container. (Cool completely first!)

136. Reheat muffins by wrapping them in tinfoil (you can put them all in the same tinfoil “package” and heat in a 400°F oven for 15 minutes.

137. Restore crispness to cookies that have inadvertently gone soft by putting them on an ungreased baking sheet and heating in a 300°F oven for 3-5 minutes.

138. For soft, chewy cookies, store in an airtight, completely-sealed container. (Cool completely first!)

139. If you want to become a dessert maven, learn the classics such as fondants (heavy sugar and water pastes, used in fillings or as an icing layer on a cake) and Chantilly creams (heavy whipping cream, sweetened). Of the two, Chantilly cream is particularly useful for beginner cooks and bakers, being easy to whip up in seconds. (The key is to make sure you use fine fruit sugar, well-dissolved so there is no gritty texture.)

Pastry and Dough

140. When making pastry, chill hands first under icy cold, running water for as long as you can stand. Dry thoroughly. Dust your hands lightly with flour before handling your dough. Then handle as little as possible!

141. Chilled dough is always easier to handle – but make sure it is covered tightly so that it doesn’t dry out – and don’t store it too long, or it will shrink.

142. Chill your water in the freezer for at least 15 minutes before adding it to any pastry recipe. (Water used in pastry recipes should always be ice-cold.)

143. To make easy, stick-free pastry, sprinkle flour on two sheets of parchment paper and spread lightly. Roll or press out your dough as you normally do. Place on one piece of parchment or wax paper and cover with the

other. Roll out. (Don't over-roll!) Lift top layer of paper every few rolls and at the first sign of sticking, sprinkle the top of your pastry with flour before replacing parchment paper. You can keep your dough between the sheets of parchment paper and chill them in the fridge till you make your pie filling, if making pie.

144. Sprinkle flour over your rolling pin and rub in gently before rolling out pastry or cookie dough, if not using the parchment paper method. It will help prevent your pastry or dough sticking to the roller. (Re-flour the rolling pin as often as necessary during the process.)

145. No matter what type of flour you use in your cookie or pastry recipe, always use all-purpose flour to sprinkle on your rolling surface or on your rolling pin.

146. How can you tell when chocolate cookies are done, since they are already "brown"? Look for a matte finish – they shouldn't look shiny.

147. Chill your dough in the refrigerator for an hour or two, if you are planning to roll out cookie dough. You won't need to use so much flour to prevent them from sticking to the rolling pin.

148. Always knead chilled cookie dough for a moment or two after removing from the refrigerator to relax the butter. (This will prevent your cookie dough from cracking when you roll it.)

149. If you are re-working the remaining dough after cutting out shapes and find that the dough becomes too rubbery, simply wrap it in plastic wrap and set it back in the refrigerator for fifteen minutes to relax it. Then continue rolling.

150. When making pierogy dough, add beaten eggs to the dough for a more pliable, thinner pastry. Place strips of wax or parchment paper between each rolled circle to prevent sticking.

151. Keep pierogy dough (and rolled-out pierogy circles) covered with damp paper towel, to prevent them drying out as you are working.

152. Re-roll individual pierogy circles a couple of quick passes with the roller, before filling. Your pastry will be thin and delicious.

153. When baking pie shells, prick uncooked pastry with a fork, to help it bake evenly on the bottom.

154. Give pie edges a decorative touch before popping them in the oven. Press the back of a fork evenly all around the rim for meat pies; scallop the edges with a small teaspoon or preserve spoon held upside down, making sure each scallop just touches the next, for desserts.

Lunches

155. When making large batches of sandwiches, make all fillings first and refrigerate. (Leave tuna or salmon till last.)

156. Garnish sandwiches with radish flowers or fresh vegetable slivers for extra visual appeal.

When making large batches of sandwiches, prepare these garnishes ahead of time and store in jars of ice-cold water till serving time. Drain and let sit on paper towel for a few minutes before garnishing plate.

157. You can freeze many types of sandwiches but avoid freezing those whose fillings contain egg, mayonnaise, lettuce or tomato.

158. When freezing sandwiches, wrap individually – don't let flavors mingle.

159. If you run out of freezer bags, you can freeze sandwiches effectively and safely by wrapping them in waxed paper; then in aluminum foil. (Make sure all seals are tight and complete.)

160. When making sandwiches in advance, wrap them in waxed paper; then cover with a slightly dampened linen tea towel.

161. If you plan to cut the crusts off party sandwiches, by all means make your sandwiches in advance – but cut off the crusts right before serving, to prevent dried-out edges.

162. If using a fresh, whole loaf for sandwiches, chill it in the refrigerator before slicing (and use a very sharp knife). You won't have those uneven torn bits, if you follow this advice.

163. You can make fancy-looking sandwiches really easily. Try ribbon sandwiches – three slices of bread, with the outer slices being white and the inner slice, brown (or vice-versa). Spread interior slices with soft fillings – cream cheese, jam, hazelnut spread, chocolate spread or the like. Wrap in wax paper and chill for at 1-2 hours. Cut off all crusts before serving.

164. Another type of party sandwich that looks impressive: Pinwheel sandwiches. Use really fresh bread, trim crusts first. Roll out bread with rolling pin. Spread with cream cheese or other soft filling. Place pitted olives or sweet gherkins in a line at one end of rolled-out slice. Roll up from the garnish end, as tightly as possible. Wrap tightly in foil or waxed paper, twisting each end to make a strong seal. Refrigerate for a minimum of 2 hours. Cut into thin slices with a very sharp knife right before serving.

165. Rolled sandwiches are looser than pinwheels, and served in one piece. For an added touch, toast them by baking in a very hot, 450°F oven for 5-7 minutes.

166. Remember to take your butter out of the fridge a couple of hours before making sandwiches, if using butter. Whip it slightly when it has softened, to make it even more spreadable.

167. For the best, most consistent garlic bread, mince a fresh garlic clove or two (to taste) and add to room-temperature butter. Whip or beat together, until minced, fresh garlic is utterly dispersed through the butter. Let sit for at 15-20 twenty minutes, to blend the flavors.

Eggs and Egg Dishes

168. Whatever size and type of egg you choose to buy, make sure it is graded AA or AAA.

169. Store eggs in the container carton you bought them in – not loose in your refrigerator-door egg bay.
170. Don't buy unrefrigerated eggs – no matter how “fresh” the grocer insists they are. Eggs need to be maintained at 40°F or slightly colder.
171. Fresh eggs can be safely kept in your refrigerator for 3-5 weeks.
172. If you want a perfect poached egg, use a fresh egg.
173. Treat uncooked eggs the same as any other food you serve, if they are out of the refrigerator – observe the 2-hour rule. (“Put leftovers away within 2 hours of serving.”)
174. Refrigerate cooked eggs straight away – and use within 3-4 days.
175. Yes, you can freeze raw eggs – but not in the shell. Freeze whole eggs in a container, and label it with the date. For mixed white-and-yolk, pour into ice cube trays. Freeze, remove, put in a container and label. (Raw eggs will keep up to a year in a chest freezer.)
176. To freeze cooked eggs, use the yolk only – the white of a cooked egg will turn unpleasantly rubbery. To prepare: Separate your raw eggs, and place each yolk carefully in a small saucepan, without breaking. Slowly add cold water to just above the yolks. Cover and (barely) bring to a fast but not rolling boil. Remove carefully with a slotted spoon onto layers of paper towel. When your eggs are well-drained, place in a container, date and freeze.
177. To make a mock Hollandaise sauce, first chop ¼ cup of butter into pieces (it doesn't have to be room temperature and will cut better if chilled). Set aside. Then make a basic white sauce -- bubble and slightly brown a tablespoon or two of flour in 2 tablespoons of butter (NOT your chopped butter!) over medium-low heat; then turn heat down and slowly add 1 cup of milk, stirring constantly.
- Add a dash of cayenne and black pepper. Mix a tablespoon or two of the sauce into 1-2 egg yolks. Pour egg yolk mixture back into your mock Hollandaise sauce, stirring constantly for a minute or two. Add your reserved, chopped butter, piece by piece, to your sauce, stirring in between each addition. Remove from heat. Add 1 tablespoon of lemon juice.

178. When you bake eggs, do so in heat-proof individual dishes, lightly greased. (2 eggs to a dish.) Cover them with 1 tbsp. milk or cream.

Sauces and Gravies

179. You can thicken sauces with more than one thickening agent – useful to know if anyone has allergies: Flour, cornstarch, rice flour, ground arrowroot, guar gum and tapioca starch. (Choose one thickening agent per sauce – don't combine!)
180. Have problems with lumpy gravy? Next time try thickening your gravy with a few instant potato flakes, stirring them in slowly and constantly.

181. Guar gum is extremely potent, so don't use anywhere near the amount you would use with flour or corn starch.
182. Use highly refined flours such as cake-and-pastry flour for thickening gravy. (It will be less likely to form a "skin" while cooling.)
183. Don't use aluminum pans for gravy prep: Use No-Stick, copper or stainless steel. (Aluminum will turn your gravy an un-appetizing grey color.)
184. Don't just stir your liquid into your flour-and-butter roux: Whisk it vigorously, without stopping, as you pour. This will help keep your gravy smooth and lump-free.
185. Your roux should be bubbly and brown lightly round the edges. The moment it starts to do this, turn the heat down to low and start adding your liquid.
186. If you discover your gravy is too heavily salted, adding a little sugar will help neutralize the salty taste.
187. Gravy too mild? Add a couple of packets (individual serving size) of Oxo or Knorr powdered bouillon (chicken or beef) and stir thoroughly.
188. Out of flour, arrowroot and cornstarch, both cornstarch and arrowroot have twice the thickening power (with arrowroot topping the list).
189. Should you refrigerate leftover meat in gravy or separately? If you want the meat for sandwiches, the answer is "separately" – but if you simply plan to reheat it; store your meat in the gravy. (This will keep your meat tasty, moist and tender.)
190. If you need to add acidity to your gravy or sauce, add wine.
191. You can add wine to a marinade. If you use your marinade as a base for your sauce, be sure to bring it just to the boil and reduce it down during the cooking process.
192. You can half the oil in any marinade and replace it with wine.
193. Always use a good quality wine when cooking. It will make a noticeable difference to your final dish. Don't buy wine designated as "cooking" wine or sherry off the supermarket shelves – it is full of sodium, deliberately added to make it undrinkable. (Chef's rule: If you wouldn't drink it, don't cook with it!)
194. It is permissible to use raw wine (young wine with stronger acidity or tannin) in cold dishes – especially if you add sugar or fruit.
195. When you soak fruit in wine without heating, this is called "maceration" (from the Latin macerare, "to sweeten and soften"). It is a technique to bring out the fruit's natural juice. (You are also macerating when you sprinkle sugar over your strawberries and let them sit for a couple of hours in the fridge.) Used in this context, maceration has nothing to do with chewing!

196. Always start adding wine as soon as possible during the cooking process, when making gravies or sauces. Avoid adding wine at the end of cooking: It won't give you the smooth, well-rounded flavor you are looking for in a wine sauce, but instead taste of raw alcohol, clashing with (and sometimes curdling) your sauce.
197. If you cook with a sweet wine, add it towards the end of cooking. Use only in dishes that require delicate flavoring – cooking kills sweet wine's nuances.
198. When using white wine to add to a dish, choose a "young" wine with apple or citrus. Its flavor notes will be sharper and fruitier, which is better for cooking. Look for the word "crisp" on wine labels and avoid anything that promises an "oaken" flavor.
199. When using red wines, avoid heavy flavors with lots of tannin or "oaken" notes. As with white, choose young wines with crisper notes.
200. Don't cook with Chardonnays or Cabernet. They usually turn bitter.
201. Add wine immediately after you have removed meat with a slotted spoon for sauces made in a shallow pan.
202. When making stews or bourguignon, add your wine immediately after the meat has browned, allowing the alcohol to reduce before adding further ingredients.
203. Sautéing your vegetables in wine is a great way to cut down on fats. Do start with a small amount of good quality oil, however; then add your wine, reducing it down as you cook the dish.
204. Try poaching your fish in wine. (You can even simmer your wine and steam your fish over it – or bake it in foil after a quick wine marinade, which should be drained off before putting the fish in foil.)
205. Reduce wine slowly over low heat for the best flavors. $\frac{3}{4}$ c. wine should reduce down to a couple of tablespoons.
206. Red wine usually has higher tannin content than white.
207. Best wines for cooking: Red—Merlot, Pinot Noir. White—Semillon, Pinot Blanc, Pinot Sauvignon. Sparkling—Use dry wines such as Freixenet Cordon Negro; not sweet wines. Best wines for cold fruit dishes: Zinfandel, Sangiovese, Riesling.
208. You don't need expensive wine for cooking – just a good quality. Choosing wines that you would actually drink with your meal is a fairly safe bet for beginners. Adding a wine that is too expensive is akin to tossing your money away, however: The subtle notes and flavors that make it unique will be lost in the cooking process.
209. You can replace oil in a cake recipe with an equal amount of white wine or sherry. (Use beer to make quickbread.)
210. Even after cooking for a significant amount of time, some alcohol will remain in your dish.

211. Refrigerate leftover wine, cork it and use it for cooking – but don't keep past 1—2 weeks. (Generally, the more wine left in a bottle, the longer you can keep it.)

212. Beer provides a great way to give body to a dish and kick it up a notch. Try marinating your fish in beer before battering and deep frying. Add beer to gravies to provide a piquant note.

Cooking with Liqueurs

213. You can macerate fruit in liqueur as well as in wine. (Grand Marnier is a favorite with pears or oranges.)

214. For a different dessert, try macerating ripe melon balls in port wine. (Dredge lightly with sugar first.)

215. When making sauces with liqueurs, avoid whisky. It reduces to an unpleasant, overpowering taste. If you do want to experiment with whisky, try adding it to strongly flavored dishes featuring pork or bacon.

216. Rum is a great liqueur to use in egg desserts: The two flavors bring out the best in each other.

217. Make a reduced sauce with sweet brandy such as cognac, or apple or apricot brandy, and drizzle it over cold hams. (Apricot brandy is particularly tasty paired with veal.)

218. Add coffee liqueurs such as Kahlua and Tía María to tiramisu-style desserts for a decadent, full-bodied, unique flavor.

219. Use Tía María in your Chantilly Cream. Garnish with dark chocolate.

Vegetarian

220. Gelatin contains animal marrow, so if you want to make something that calls for it, use Agar instead. (It's made from algae.)

221. Chantilly cream: Whipped cream with added vanilla.

222. If your sponge cake has dried around the edges, revive it by brushing the edges lightly with a syrup of sugar and water.

223. For a quick, delicious veggieburger, slice the top off a portabella mushroom and remove the stem. Brush with marinade of your choice, including minced garlic (if you like garlic). Grill on the barbecue and use as a veggieburger with tomato and mustard or steak sauce.

224. Make sure you invest in a great spice rack and a wonderful collection of fresh spices, if you are planning to go vegetarian. Adding spices and herbs is essential: It can bring the taste of vegetarian dishes from mundane to heavenly.

225. Try using a pressure cooker, if you make a lot of vegetable ratatouilles or stews. It will preserve all the vitamins – and concentrate the flavor.
226. Vegetarian diets are usually rich in fiber, but make sure you are getting adequate daily protein. (46-60g per day for the average woman). Good sources of protein are avocado (10 g. per whole fruit); lentils (18 g. per cup); other legumes (from 13-15 g. per cup, depending on variety); tofu (22 g. per cup); soy or almond milk (7-9 g. per cup); quinoa (9 g. per cup).
227. If you don't naturally eat enough protein in your preferred vegetarian or vegan daily food choices, do be sure to supplement this by adding protein drinks.
228. Add protein powder to hot cereal or baking for extra protein.
229. Turn left-over rice into fried rice by sautéing in oil with minced ginger and garlic. Add green onion or pineapple. Finish with a good dash of soya or tamari sauce. Add roasted pepper chunks for color and flavor, as well as your favorite spices. (Get creative!)
230. Quickly turn your leftover rice into a bean burrito by heating it with a can of refried beans and lacing it with hot sauce. (Add grated, fresh cheese, if you are not vegan.)
231. Use leftover rice in quiche by making a rice crust. (Simply blend rice, grated fresh cheese and 1 egg together and press mixture into your pie plate; about 1/4" thickness.) Fill and bake as you would with any other type of quiche.
232. You can make condensed milk from almond milk, if you are vegan. (There are several recipes online.) Or simply substitute canned coconut milk.
233. Make "whipped cream" by refrigerating a can of coconut milk for a couple of days. When you open the can, it will have separated into a thick layer and a thin. Remove the thick layer and whip it. (Add a hint of maple syrup for extra oomph.)
234. Making sure your meals are balanced, with adequate amounts of protein and fiber, doesn't have to result in "boring" taste. Include chewy ingredients to give the meal staying power emotionally. Combine flavors and textures. Add spices and herbs. Include color for eye appeal.
235. If you make your own tomato passata or sauces, slow roast your tomatoes first for extra-intense, rich flavor.
236. Whip up a quick, tasty curry with cubes of butternut squash, a tablespoon or two of Madras curry paste, a can of coconut milk and fresh coriander. (Add chunks of red pepper for contrast and taste.) Sizzle your curry paste for about a minute in a wok, stir in your squash cubes and red pepper, mixing well. Add your coconut milk and half a cup of water and simmer for 20-30 minutes (until liquid has reduced and your curry has thickened). Garnish with fresh coriander and spices to taste.
237. Visit Peta.org to view the "ultimate Vegan cheat sheet" on how to replace eggs in your baking – and what with.

238. Bake slower and lower, when you're not using eggs. (In other words, reduce the temperature and increase the time.)
239. When following vegan or vegetarian recipes, follow them exactly – don't omit or substitute ingredients. Doing so can greatly damage the final outcome, since various ingredients are there to replace non-vegan or non-vegetarian components, and have a direct action on the cake.
240. Don't try to combine "low fat" with vegetarian baking. You'll end up with a dry, disappointing cake.
241. Avoid the infamous vegetarian "lead bread" syndrome by using equal parts of unbleached white flour with whole grain flour (whole grain alone is too dense).
242. Use plain or original flavor when substituting nut or grain milks for regular milk in sauces, entrées or soups. (You can experiment with the flavored nut or grain milks in baking.)
243. If your vegan or vegetarian cake mixture is too runny, add a little extra flour with a pinch of baking soda.

Low Carb

244. You cannot combine a low-fat and low-carb diet: To do so is dangerous. You need the fat to compensate for the low number of carbs – and to help you feel satiated.
245. Do include fruits and vegetables in your low-carb diet. (Just make sure you know exactly how many carbs is in the ones you choose.)
246. Berries are the most low-carb of all the fruits – use them in green, leafy salads to dress them up and give a hint of sweetness. Combine with your favorite nuts.
247. Arugula holds the record as lowest-carb veggie – so use it in your next leafy green salad (1 gram per cup – half the carbs of iceberg and romaine lettuce.)
248. Watch those salad dressings – the carbs can really add up!
249. Asparagus, cucumber, celery, green pepper, mushrooms (white), okra, radishes, rapini, and – surprisingly – turnip all contain around 4 grams per ½ cup. So mix-and-match them to dress up your salads.
250. Cabbage, cauliflower and yellow and red peppers all equal about 6 net carb grams per cup, cooked. (Broccoli, surprisingly, has more net carbs than turnip at 10g per cup.)
251. Include fiber in your recipes – something low carb dieters often forget to do, when they give up starchy fruits and vegetables. Remember that low carb produce such as berries and leafy greens can contribute lots of fiber to your recipes. Fiber is not digested, so isn't part of your carb count. And almost all of the non-starchy fruits and veggies do contain the highest amount of fiber.
252. If you are craving something salty and crunchy, make kale chips! Buy a head of kale. Heat your oven to 275°F, wash kale pieces and pat dry. Tear out the thicker part of the stem in an inverted "V" shape.

Sprinkle with olive oil and coarse sea salt. Bake for about 40-50 minutes. Let chips cool before eating.

253. Use flax and chia seeds to make things like wraps: Not only are they low carb, but they contain great fiber content.

254. Try bacon “sandwiches” for breakfast. Cook bacon until crispy. Let it cool slightly. Dab real mayonnaise on each slice and layer a single strip of cherry tomatoes. Sprinkle with pepper and enjoy!

255. Make crisp cheese “pizza” by pressing your favorite grated cheeses into the bottom of a greased pizza pan. Bake in a hot oven (425°F) for 7-10 minutes. Let cool and carefully remove. (Tap bottom of pan sharply, and loosen with spatula knife.)

256. Try rice noodle nests instead of regular wheat noodles if you are craving a carbohydrate-loaded snack. Cook according to directions and season with a dash or two of soya or tamari sauce. (Check your soya carb count: Remember there is wheat and therefore some carbohydrates in soya sauce.)

257. Add avocado to your salads – its satiety factor is high and a whole avocado contains only 3 grams carbohydrate. (In fact, 1 cup of blackberries at 6 grams contains twice as many carbs as avocado.)

258. Miss lasagna? No problem. Substitute zucchini for noodles – the net carb count in zucchini is less than 2 grams per ½ cup. (But sprinkle salt on the zucchini first, to absorb moisture and make them less mushy.)

259. Remember that fat is going to do the job that sugar and carbs once did, when it comes to leaving you feeling satisfied at the end of a meal. But do cook with healthy fats, such as olive oil and coconut oil.

260. Add butter to servings of meat, for a richer, higher satiety value. (Just make sure you count your daily fat servings, too.) Many low carb dieters cite this as the best trick to keep you on the straight and narrow.

261. Remember that you can now eat many foods that were probably previously on your “Foods to Avoid” list, if you tried other weight loss methods. Meat, fat and skin are now your friends.

262. If you can stomach them and have strong teeth, here’s another favorite low-carb “treat” to try – pork rinds. You can get them in a variety of flavors and they will fill you up really quickly due to a higher fat content (29 g for ¼ cup rinds). However, almost half pork rind fat is oleic (the same as olive oil) and stearic (will not raise cholesterol levels). And there are zero carbs.

263. Another pasta substitute: Japanese Shirataki noodles, at 6 grams per ½ cup. They tend to be bland and somewhat gelatinous, with zero nutritious value, so use them as an occasional treat.

264. Be aware that Shirataki noodles can have an off-putting “boiled sock” smell. Open windows, use your fan – and keep in mind that they will taste better than they look, providing you use lots of tasty sauce.

Diabetic Cooking

265. Shirataki noodles are better for diabetics than regular pasta. In addition to falling low on the glycemic index, they are high in a dietary fiber called glucomannan – which health food stores sell as a weight loss

supplement. (And they contain zero sugar.)

266. If you make pasta, cook it al dente: Firmer pasta will not raise your blood sugar as high as soft-cooked pasta.

267. Remember that carbohydrates affect your glycemic index as much as sugar. Be sure to check carb counts in recipes – and follow the plan your dietician created with you.

268. Use diabetic exchange lists to make your recipes more diabetes-friendly. Be proactive, and get to know what you can substitute– and when you should do so.

269. Use liquid fats such as olive oil in your cooking: Solid fats tend to contain more trans fats (the “bad” kind – especially for diabetics!)

270. Your aim is to reduce fats, since they contain a high number of calories: So do skim fat off the top of soups, chili and stews. (This is especially easy if the food has cooled in the refrigerator and you are about to reheat it. The fat will be solid, opaque and white; and you can lift off the chunks easily.)

271. Substitute complex carbohydrates (ones absorbed more slowly by your system) for processed carbs. This means choosing whole grain flour over white flour, whole grain breads over white bread and whole grain pasta over white pasta. (Fruits and vegetables are also excellent sources of complex carbohydrates.)

272. Re-train your taste buds to “like” less sugar in recipes. Most North American recipes overdo the sugar portion and can be reduced by half or even one quarter – without any noticeable difference in taste.

273. Remember that sugar is the simplest form of carbohydrate and can raise your blood sugar almost instantly – a big danger for diabetics – so find a sugar substitute you like and that you tolerate well. Or try going without and adding other flavors – like cinnamon – instead.

274. Sugar substitutes are not all created equal, so play around until you find one that works well for you. For instance, some people are highly intolerant to one particular type, while others swear by it. And some love the taste of one type, while others loathe it.)

275. Be aware that cutting the sugar means less crispness to your cookies. Restore the ability to “crisp” by flattening unbaked cookies on the baking tray with a spoon. (Dust the back of your spoon with flour between cookies, if you find the spoon sticks.)

276. Did you know that sugar acts as a preservative? If you drastically cut the amount, this also means you should cut the amount of time you store cake batter or cookie dough in the refrigerator. (Don’t keep batters for more than two days, tops.)

277. Don’t assume that all diabetic snacks, treats and foods are “safe”. They may be perfectly acceptable in themselves, but eaten at the wrong time or with the wrong combination of food, can raise your blood sugar levels.

278. Craving chocolate? Try nibbling a square of dark baker’s chocolate, or letting it melt on your tongue. Check the contents carefully, however: Baker’s chocolate is not supposed to contain sugar – but some do.

279. When baking or cooking with baker's chocolate, look for the highest "cacao %". (A high cacao percentage means less sugar and more pure cocoa bean.)
280. Add two pieces (1 square) of top-quality baker's chocolate to chili. It will cut the acid and boost the flavor – without adding sugar; and while doing the job sugar used to do in acid reduction.
281. Use herbs and spices to enhance the flavor of your recipes – not sugar or salt. (Add most herbs towards the end of cooking for maximum flavor.) And while salt won't raise your glycemic index, it can cause high blood pressure – something often associated with diabetes; especially when obesity is involved.
282. If you haven't already seen a nutritionist or dietician, ask your doctor to refer you to one. Nutritionists and dieticians are familiar with diabetes and can provide you with exchange lists, recipes, tips – and help you custom-tailor your diet.
283. If you jump on the latest trend and substitute agave nectar for sugar, be sure to lower your baking temperature by 25 degrees. (You may need to reduce your baking time, too.)
284. Substitute olive oil for butter, lard or margarine in your cooking and baking, wherever possible. It contains zero trans fats and is much better for you.
285. If a recipe calls for not just fat, but the consistency of butter (e.g. shortbreads) try Smart Balance® sticks, made with a combination of oil and butter. Contains no hydrogenated oils, Omega 3 EPA/DHA, zero grams trans fats and 28% less saturated fat than butter.
286. To reduce fats even further, stir fry with water to which just a dash of tamari or soy sauce has been added. (Check the label of the sauce you buy first, since both tamari and soy can contain wildly varying levels of sugar or wheat.)
287. If you use cake mix, try using natural ones containing whole grain flours and less white sugar. (Check out your local health food store for brands like Bob's Red Mill.)
288. Angel Food cake is often recommended in hospitals and by dieticians for diabetics, but do be aware it is not sugar and carb-free, at 30g carbohydrates per slice. A better bet is to make your own (there are plenty of low-sugar recipes to be found on the net). And be aware that toppings can add considerably to your carb and sugar count.
289. Try using no-sugar pudding mixes as a topping for Angel Food cake (make it a little thinner than normal).

Ethnic Foods

290. Spice up your cooking by adding at least one ethnic dish to your table now and again. The key to doing this successfully lies in making sure your ethnic dish complements or contrasts the other flavor notes at the table.

291. For wafer-thin pierogy dough, add eggs. (The fashion in North America is to make pierogy dough without them, but this is not traditional.) Roll out between flour-dusted parchment paper. Separate rounds with parchment paper strips or squares. Chill and re-roll a couple of passes before filling.

292. For a Mexican kick, marinate pork roast or tenderloins overnight in ½ cup of tequila mixed with 1 ½ cups orange juice. Add chili powder, garlic and honey, along with cracked black pepper. Barbecue or roast.

293. Cook beef with rice vinegar, green onions and ginger for a quick Chinese dish. Reduce sauce and serve over rice.

294. Turn left-over rice into perfect Chinese fried rice by sautéing finely-chopped scallions briefly, then adding your rice. Sauté for a few minutes more, and add a dash of tamari or soy sauce.

295. Tofu makes a wonderful main source of protein, as well as being versatile in appetizers and desserts. Tofu absorbs flavors beautifully – nothing can beat simple tofu cubes sautéed in tamari sauce and sprinkled with lightly toasted sesame seeds. Coconut milk, oyster sauce (hoisin) and ginger are ways to give tofu a real kick. And if you want it to take on a Tai note, combine your tofu recipe with a tablespoon or two of natural peanut butter.

296. To turn meatballs and gravy into Swedish meatballs and gravy, add a small pinch of ginger powder to your meatballs, mix with fine breadcrumbs and other seasonings of your choice – but, most importantly, stir heavy cream into your gravy.

297. Eggs, milk, sugar, flour, salt and butter are all you need to make Swedish pancakes. These are like thin crêpes, so make like ordinary pancakes, but add enough milk to form a thin batter that just drizzles off the spoon. Pre-heat an oiled, heavy, medium frying pan and add ½ cup batter in the center when your oil is sizzling. (Test with a drop of batter first.) The trick to creating perfect, thin pancakes lies in picking up the pan as soon as you've added the batter, and moving the pan in a circular motion to swirl the batter.

298. When making crêpes or thin pancakes of any nationality, note that the fillings or garnishes are often what gives it a distinctive ethnic flavor – the basic crêpe recipe is often quite similar. For Swedish pancakes, fill or top with lingonberries or lingonberry preserve; for Eastern European pancakes, fill with plum or strawberries and use sour cream as a garnish; for Austrian or German pancakes, fill with almonds, raisin and apple.

For traditional English pancakes, roll up your crêpe (with or without a light spread of strawberry jam first) and sprinkle with plain sugar and lemon juice. In all cultures, fillings or garnishes are varied and seasonal, and can be savory or sweet; a light dessert, breakfast, or a main meal – so don't be afraid to experiment.

299. When you make ethnic pancakes, pay attention to the cream you use as a garnish. For example, English or Scottish pancakes go well with strawberry jam and clotted cream (for clotted cream, buy heavy Devonshire cream in cans or bottles). Eastern European pancakes are often served with sour cream. And Scandinavian pancakes are usually served with fruit and ice cream or whipped cream.

300. Adding an ethnic soup to your dinner party menu can be a fun way to introduce your guests to new flavors. Adding barley, leeks, peppercorns and a bay leaf to a simple chicken soup gives you Scottish Cock-a-Leekie soup. Adding a dash of soy sauce and finely-chopped spring onions to simple beef broth (and dropping in beads of beaten egg) creates quick Chinese egg-drop soup.

Making borscht with red beets added gives you traditional Polish barszcz, whereas cabbage, potato and tomato borscht gives you the better-known Russian borscht. Serving meat, mushroom or cabbage pierogy with Polish barszcz gives you a key component of the traditional Christmas Eve feast. (You put them in the soup). And sour cream is always a traditional go-with for any type of borscht. (Serve it on the side for those who don't like sour cream.)

301. If you want to add an authentic Italian note to your meal, serve a light pasta course before your main meat course and finish off with the salad – don't serve your salad first.

302. Use peanut oil to give any Chinese dish a Thai flavor. Add lime juice, if the recipe allows it.

303. Traditional British shortbread is made with rice flour, and tends to be thick but light and firm.

304. Irish soda bread is a quickbread – and it is delicious with stews. Baking soda and buttermilk replace the yeast; and currants are often added, if it's to be a sweet bread. You can make basic soda bread quickly by combining 1½ cups unbleached flour, ½ tsp. each of salt and baking soda and ½ pint buttermilk.

Turn out on a lightly-floured board and knead for a few minutes. Form into a rough, round loaf. Cut a cross shape on top of the bread. Bake for 30 minutes at 400°F. When you take your loaf out of the oven, it should sound hollow when you tap the bottom. Cool it on a wire rack. Eat the same day.

305. If you can get breadfruit in your local market, consider making a Jamaican fruit cake for the holiday season for a delicious difference. (There are plenty of recipes online.)

306. To make Jamaican Jerk Chicken, buy Jerk Rub seasoning. Cut a lime in half and rub your chicken pieces with it. Rub in coarse sea salt and your Jerk Rub seasoning. Marinate in the refrigerator overnight. The next day, either bake it in a 375°F oven or grill it on medium-high on a preheated barbecue grill.

307. If your dinner guests aren't into wines, buy authentic soft drinks to serve with your ethnic dishes from the Ethnic or Imported Foods section of your food store: Ting for Jamaican dishes; Barr's Irn Bru for Scottish meals and Coconut milk or juice for any Asian or Caribbean meal.

308. If you are planning to serve an ethnic meal to new in-laws or guests from another country from their homeland, keep it low-key. Cook in the style they are used to, or with meats or methods they are used to, but don't present it as their traditional dish:

There are myriads of variations in single dishes from village to village, region to region. To insist that you are serving traditional dishes is to invite comparison and criticism in many cultures, rather than praise. And remember that in general, the older the guest, the more rigid (and likely) the comparison. (Just be yourself – and serve the dishes you make best!)

Cooking for Kids

309. When making food for children, remember that generally their taste buds are not yet fully developed, while their higher density of anterior papillae make them more receptive to sweet flavors, according to a Danish study

at the University of Copenhagen. As children grow older, they are able to distinguish and appreciate more subtle flavors – but don't expect them to react to a good pepper steak the way you would!

310. Children love sweets and simple carbohydrates, so it can be a battle to get them to ingest vegetables and proteins. Remember that visual appeal can help you win these battles, according to a Stanford University study (and based on many parents' experiences).

Try making a smiley face out of ketchup on an omelet or grilled cheese sandwich, or making "stories" when you arrange vegetables or fruits on a plate. Play food games with small children. ("Open wide for the airplane!") And use color instead of flavor to appeal to children's senses. (Try special plates, different bright colors for each child. And avoid bland-looking presentations.)

311. Let children add their favorite condiment to any food you want them to try – even if you think it's "yucky". (Ketchup is the big front runner.)

312. Serve small portions to children. One of the biggest causes of mealtime anxiety is parental insistence that children eat portions too large for their tiny tummies.

313. Don't force picky eaters to eat. This will only turn meals into a battleground, causing the child either to feel intense anxiety over eating – or become combative and stubborn.

Instead, take your child to a dietitian or nutritionist, and come up with minimum intakes for food groups per day. If he or she doesn't consume this in meals, try adding supplements such as PediaSure (sweet drinks children usually love).

314. Make veggie sticks easy to eat by chopping them finely and keeping the pieces small. Store them in water in the fridge overnight (in a sealed jar): Drain them on paper towel and bag them right before assembling the lunch. They will taste fresher and better this way – and you won't be frazzled from trying to peel and chop vegetables while your children dawdle over getting dressed.

315. If your child has a peanut allergy, make sure everyone at their school knows about it – from the principal down to the janitor. Also make sure everyone knows what to do – and leave at least three Epipens with the school, since severe anaphylactic reactions will hardly be dented by one.

316. Be aware that peanut allergy is one of the most severe and potentially fatal allergies currently in existence. Children who are allergic to peanuts can suffer anaphylactic shock and die merely from being in contact with something touched by peanuts – including your child's hand or picking up a wrapper. It's better to avoid sending peanut products with your child to school completely (even if the school doesn't currently have rules about this, which many do).

317. If your child won't eat a new food, adopt a laid-back attitude – but continue to serve it at later meals. (Try varying the presentation). Don't force children to eat – but don't allow them to veto foods: At least serve a small portion or even one piece on their plates.

318. Get children involved in food selection and preparation – they'll be far more likely to eat the results!

319. Make sure you let children help you in the kitchen when it is a relaxed day and you have plenty of time. Remember their focus will not be on getting things done speedily; it will be on experimentation and having fun.

320. Never turn down a child who wants to help with meal preparations. If you do have to turn them down (e.g. eight people are coming for a formal dinner in fifteen minutes), make a concrete date with them in the very immediate future to cook together.

321. Give your older toddler a piece of pastry dough to play with, when making pastry or pies. It will keep her happy and occupied. (Let her bake the results if she wants to; and don't worry about "germs".)

322. Let children do food prep tasks they find fun (e.g. shelling fresh peas). Don't force them to do ones they hate – there is usually a good reason for the aversion. (E.g. "Mom, this peeler cuts into my finger!")

323. If your child has a weight problem, cut down on fruit juices – they are full of sugar; even the natural ones. Give your child snacks that require chewing such as half a bagel or finely-chopped veggie sticks or fruit pieces. Snacks like juices and yogurt are not only sweet; they're gone in no time, leaving the overweight child still feeling hungry.

324. Note your overweight child's peak hunger periods, and try to figure out what is causing this time period to be the trigger time. Does he always associate food with getting home from school? Does he eat while reading? Has he skipped lunch? Come up with solutions that are ideally suited to your child's unique triggers.

325. Remember that kids like foods that are easy to eat. Use this preference for you rather than against you, when preparing lunches, snacks and meals. And do include easy-to-eat foods like PediaSure drinks, cheese straws or yogurt if your child has a ridiculously short time allotted for eating at school.

326. Be creative when sending school lunches. Try bagging cold, mini-sized meatballs (without sauce!) Or including a hard-boiled egg; or stuffing celery with cream cheese.

327. If your child doesn't finish his lunch (or doesn't eat his school lunch), serve all or part of it as a snack later. Don't do this with a punitive attitude, however: Keep it casual. ("Mom, I'm hungry!", "Well, here are your pretzels.")

328. Children love chicken nuggets. Make your own chicken nuggets and bake rather than deep-fry: It's a healthier alternative for kids.

329. If your child always cries and kicks up a fuss over a particular meal, find out exactly what he is objecting to: Sometimes removing the offending garnish or not pouring gravy over his potatoes is all it takes to make him a happy eater.

330. Don't fall into the fatal trap of raising your child on take-out food, sugars and carbohydrates: It will seriously affect his health in later life. A packet of French fries may be inexpensive and your child may love them – but you wouldn't deprive yourself of protein, so make sure he has enough protein during his day.

331. Make a recipe book of favorite family recipes for each of your children and give it to them before they head off to college, a new job in a distant city or marriage. (Keep a back-up copy; they may "lose" it several times before finally deciding later in life that they miss your recipes!)

Appetizers and Snacks

332. When preparing for a party, keep appetizers simple – and spend your energy on the presentation.
333. Use only the freshest vegetables for crudités. Buy them as close to your party as possible.
334. Water Chestnuts soaked in tamari sauce and minced garlic; then wrapped in bacon, secured with a toothpick and broiled in the oven make a fantastic canapé or hors d'oeuvres dish.
335. Remember that color is as important in snack or hors d'oeuvres presentation as taste and freshness. Use contrasting colors for impact. Avoid a bland palette: Pair naturally bland-colored items like potato chips with colorful dips and garnishes.
336. To make a simple dip feel more special, hollow out a loaf of sourdough or pumpernickel bread, and fill with dip. Serve with crudités.
337. To properly prepare mushrooms – either to be sliced and served raw or for stuffing – clean the outside surface of the mushroom with a damp paper towel and chop off the end of each stalk.
338. Stuffed mushrooms make delectable, savory hors d'oeuvres or canapés – but they can also flop dismally. To prevent your mushroom snack being messy or bland, use specialty mushrooms like cremini. Never use ordinary white mushrooms, which are most likely to taste watery and fall apart when you try to stuff them – though you can use the large stuffing ones. In fact, always make sure you use large mushrooms, not small ones.
339. Button mushrooms are finicky to stuff, so if you are determined to serve an appetizer that calls for this size and type, be sure to practice making your recipe ahead of important dinner parties.
340. Use a melon baller to hollow out your mushroom further. Simply removing the stem is not satisfactory and leads to mess.
341. Use dry fillings in your mushrooms, if you are planning to use them as finger-foods (canapés). A little cream cheese can bind fillings together, and bread crumbs added to your filling will help absorb moisture, since mushrooms are naturally moist.
342. Since mushrooms are bland, make sure your fillings are piquant or spicy.
343. Make your favorite appetizers into your main course – or invite people around for drinks and canapés only.
344. If you are planning a dinner party or holiday feast and people ask “what to bring” – ask them to bring their favorite appetizer. You’ll get a wonderful selection of dishes – and you didn’t have to prepare a thing!
345. Make appetizers that freeze well. That way, you can prepare them in advance and simply thaw them (or thaw and bake) the day of your party.
346. Never thaw appetizers at room temperature. Thaw them (still in their packages) in the refrigerator, on a container or dish.

347. Practice making, freezing, thawing and heating (if required) your appetizers ahead of time, if you have never made them before. If you aren't able to do this, allot time to make them, fresh, the day of the party – or assign it to a family member or guest.

348. Mini-quiches freeze extremely well.

349. Appetizers containing fish can be frozen up to 3 months; meats, up to 6 months.

350. Ask right on your invitations that people notify you of serious allergies. (Include the word “serious”, or – guaranteed – you'll get long lists of likes and dislikes.) If any of your guests does have a serious allergy, however, it's important to know that there must be absolutely no risk of cross-contamination (e.g. pinwheel sandwiches prepared on a board where almonds have been chopped – even if that board was washed). Better not to serve anything containing the offending ingredient, and warn other guests bringing food about this, too.

351. Consider making cheese balls for your party or holiday feast. They can be made ahead of time and you can dress them up in a variety of ways to add “Wow” factor. (Try layering rows of toasted almond slices, slanting upward, to create a “Christmas pine cone” effect. Or rolling your soft cheese ball in fresh, finely-diced herbs... or nuts... or peppercorns.)

Fruits and Vegetables

352. Try using Portabella mushrooms in dishes next time: The rich, savory, “beefsteak” flavor can really kick up your dish by several notches.

353. If your potatoes show signs of budding or decay, your storage arrangements are not ideal. To store properly, sort your potatoes and remove ones that are bruised, cut or damaged. DO NOT WASH. Lay potatoes on a thick layer of newspapers in a cool, dark cupboard or pantry. After a couple of weeks, line a basket with a single layer of newspaper.

Add a single layer of potatoes. Add another layer of newspaper. Add a single layer of potatoes. Repeat this as many times as you need (or as the basket will hold), finishing off with a layer of newspaper. Your aim is to prevent light from reaching the potatoes (light is their enemy!) Check your potatoes about once a week, to make sure no renegades are turning “bad” – which can ruin the entire basket-full.

354. 50-60°F is the perfect storage temperature for potatoes. Refrigerators are generally not only too cold, but far too damp. (If you don't have a cool pantry, find a spot out of the light in your basement.)

355. If you don't want to practice the layering method, at least sort your potatoes and place the remainder in a cardboard box or thick, brown paper bag. Seal loosely by closing box or folding over bag top.

356. If you grow your own potatoes, let them dry out thoroughly before storing. If you have leftover potatoes stored in the spring, use them as starter potatoes in your garden.

357. Store apples by starting out as you would with potatoes – sorting out damaged ones. With apples, however, store them in a mesh or perforated plastic bag. They like a cooler temperature than potatoes (30-35°F).

358. Choosing apples for storage: Late-harvest varieties store the best (for one thing, they'll be fresher than apples picked in summer; and it's easier to keep them cool). Choose ripe fruit for storage – unripe apples will store poorly and are likely to be unpalatable after ripening.

359. Apples may last up to six months, if stored properly: However, with some varieties, the skin may wrinkle a little in the later stages. As long as the apple is still firm, shows no discoloration and smells sweet, you can peel off the wrinkled skin. The texture may be slightly woody for eating – but they are perfect for cooking and reducing into compotes or baking in pies.

360. Store apples by variety: Do not mix. Different types of apples ripen at different stages.

361. You can freeze raw apple slices – but they need to be treated first. This involves peeling and coring before slicing, dipping or gently tossing them in lemon juice (to prevent discoloration), then dipping or gently tossing them in sugar. (Add cinnamon or a hint of cloves, if you wish.) Deep-freeze them immediately on a baking tray.

When frozen, place them in large freezer bags. Frozen apples can be placed, unthawed, in a pie crust, covered with a top pastry layer and baked – but do increase your baking time. (You can also put them, frozen, in a greased casserole dish and cover with apple crisp or crumble topping; then bake.)

362. As with apples, choose late-variety onions for storage, if you are planning to store farmer's market or garden onions. Yellow, red and white onions all store equally well – but stronger-smelling onions store the best. (The smell is caused by sulphites, which act as a preservative.)

363. As with potatoes, cure your onions for a couple of weeks, letting them dry out in a location with no light. You can tell they are ready for storage when the outside is dry and papery – and the stems no longer appear green. Store them in a similar temperature range to potatoes – about 45-55°F. If storing with potatoes or other vegetables, don't allow the onions to touch them and be aware that the smell may permeate your other vegetables, if it is too pungent. Humidity should be no greater than 65%.

364. Frugalliving.about.com offers a novel alternative to storing onions: Taking a pair of clean panty-hose, dropping an onion in the toe, making a knot, dropping another onion in, making another knot and so on until the entire "leg" is filled with single layers of single onions. When you need an onion, "cut a slit in the side of one of the tied-off sections" and remove.

365. With all porous, fleshy fruits and vegetables with a high moisture content – such as apples or potatoes – do not let them come in contact with other fruits and vegetables, especially onions. (The flavor of the other vegetable is liable to transfer to your porous potatoes or apples.)

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